

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

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AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DACCA 5543

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BG

SUBJ: KHONDAKAR MOSHTAQUE AHMED: A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS?

1. IN THE AFTERMATH OF NOVEMBER 7 OUSTER OF KHALID MOSHARRAF, WHO HAD THE DAY PREVIOUS FORCED THE RESIGNATION OF KHONDAKAR MOSHTAQUE AHMED FROM THE PRESIDENCY, THE RECENTLY REVIVIED HOLIDAY CARRIED AN ARTICLE BY ITS GUIDING GENIUS, ENEYATULLAH KHAN, UNDER THE CAPTION "A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS" LAUDING MOSHTAQUE'S STATEMANSHIP. THE ARTICLE PLACES OVERWHELMING EMPHASIS ON MOSHTAQUE'S COURAGE -- DEMONSTRATED UNDER MUJIB WHEN HE RESISTED INDIAN PRESSURES ON FARAKKA BARRAGE -- AND ON NOVEMBER 3 WHEN HE RESISTED EFFORTS TO OBTAIN HIS RESIG-
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NATION UNTIL THE THREAT OF BLOODSHED HAD BEEN OVERWHELMED

-- BUT ALSO PRAISED HIM FOR HIS MODESTY. AFTER POINTING OUT THAT HE DIFFERS FROM MOSHTAQUE ON MANY ISSUES, ENEYATULLAH NEVERTHELESS CONCLUDES THAT, "HIS ACHIEVEMENTS ARE MUCH MORE THAN HIS FAILURES..."

2. THIS IS A VIEW WHICH MAY UNDERSTATE MOSHTAQUE'S ACHIEVEMENTS, AND MAY FAIL TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE BREADTH OF THE FORMER PRESIDENT'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS. WE FOLLOWED CLOSELY THE COURSE OF MOSHTAQUE'S GRIEF, 80-DAY PRESIDENCY, AND -- ALTHOUGH IN THE EARLY PERIOD WE AMONG MANY OBSERVERS WERE LOOKING FOR MORE VIGOROUS DECISIONS AND LEADERSHIP -- WE WERE IMPRESSED BY THE OVERALL TRACK RECORD. HE TOOK DECISIONS WHICH WERE IMPORTANT FOR THE BANGALEES, ALTHOUGH THE THING FOR WHICH HE IS PRESENTLY BEST REMEMBERED -- A DECLINE IN THE PRICE OF RICE -- PERHAPS OWES AS MUCH TO NATURE AS TO HIS ADMINISTRATION. SMUGGLING WAS HALTED; GREATER SCOPE WAS GIVEN THE PRIVATE SECTOR; CREDIT WAS IVERALIZED; ECONOMIC REFORMS, IF NOT INTRODUCED BY NOVEMBER 3, APPEAR TO HAVE LAIN IN THE IMMEDIATE OFFING; ELECTIONS WERE NOT ONLY PROMISED BUT SCHEDULED; AND MOSHTAQUE MADE NO CLAIM TO BEING INDISPENSABLE. AND IN THE LAST 60 OR SO HOURS OF HIS PRESIDENCY, MOSHTAQUE DISPLAYED GREAT COURAGE AS HE WORKED -- SUCCESSFULLY -- TO PREVENT BLOODSHED.

3. MOSHTAQUE'S MOST RECENT ACT -- THE DECISION TO REJECT THE OFFER TO RESUME THE PRESIDENCY FOLLOWING MOSHARRAF'S FALL -- IS SEEN AS FURTHER EVIDENCE OF HIS STATESMANSHIP. IT WAS, HOWEVER, PERHAPS SOMETHING MORE THAN THAT; IT MAY HAVE REVEALED A SOUND SENSE OF REALITY. ON AUGUST 15, MOSHTAQUE WAS THRUST INTO THE PRESIDENCY. HIS ASSETS AT THAT TIME WERE LIMITED. HIS PERSONAL POLITICAL BASE WAS SMALL AND HIS NATIONAL STANDING WAS VERY LIMITED. NEVERTHELESS, HE BECAME THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN THE EQUATION WHICH PROVIDED BANGLADESH WITH GOVERNMENT. FOUR CHIEF ELEMENTS, OTHER THAN MOSHTAQUE, ENTERED THE EQUATION -- THE MAJORS, THE SENIOR MILITARY, THE CIVILIAN CABINET REPRESENTIN THE ERSTWHILE AWAMI KEAGUE AND, OF LESSER IMPORTANCE, THE BUREAUCRACY.

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NONE OF THESE ELEMENTS COULD HOPE TO RULE ALONE -- THE MAJORS WERE TOO YOUNG, TO INEXPERIENCED, AND COMMANDED TOO LITTLE SUUPPORT; THE SENIOR MILITARY WERE RIVEN BE FACTIONALISM, THE AUGUST 15 COUP REVEALED THE LIMITED DESCIPLENE OF THE FORCES, AND THERE APARED NO DESIRE ON THE PART OF SENIOR COMMANDERS TO RUN THE RISK OF FURTHER DAMAGE TO THE MILITARY'S REPUTATION THAT AN ATTEMPT TO RULE WOULD POSE; THE

CIVILIAN CABINET, MADE UP OVERSHELMINGLY OF OLD AWAMI LEAGUERS, WAS A THOROUGHLY DISCREDITED GROUP BY REASON OF THEIR IDENTIFICATION WITH MUJIB; AND THE BUREAUCRACY HAD NO STANDING AND WAS COMPLETELY DEMORALIZED BY FOUR YEARS OF CONSTANT INTERFERENCE AND MANIPULATION. IN THIS SETTING, MOSHTAQUE SERVED TO KEEP THE EDIFICE OF GOVERNMENT INTACT AND FUNCTIONING, AND, EVEN MORE REMARKABLY, TO ACHIEVE THE POSITIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS NOTED ABOVE. HOWEVER, HIS ROLE WAS, WE THINK, DEPENDENT ON THE NEED OF OTHERS FOR HIS MEDIATORY TOL. NOW THE MAJORS ARE GONE, THE CIVILIAN CABINET HAS DISAPPEARED, AND THE MILITARY'S PROBLEMS ARE THOSE WHICH IT CAN ALONE RESOLVE. THE QUESTION POSED ON NOVEMBER 7 WAS IMPLY: HAD MOSHTAQUE ACHIEVED THE PERSONAL STANDING WHICH WOULD HAVE PERMITTED HIM TO RESUME THE PRESIDENCY?

4. WE THINK THAT HE PROBABLY DID, BUT FOR THE DARK SIDE OF HIS STORY. MOSHTAQUE'S PARTICIPATION IN -- OR SIMPLY FOREKNOWLEDGE OF -- THE AUGUST 15 COUP IS STILL A MATTER PRIMARILY OF SPECULATION. NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS A SEIZABLE BODY OF OPINION WHICH CONCLUDED THAT HE WAS AWARE THAT THE DEATH OF SHEIKH MUJIB WAS PLANNED, ALTHOUGH HE MAY NOT HAVE REALIZED HOW EXTENSIVE THE KILLINGS WOULD BE. AND THE NOVEMBER 3 KILLINGS IN CENTRAL JAIL OCCURRED WHILE HE WAS PRESIDENT. WHETHER HE HAD ADVANCE KNOWLEDGE OF THESE LATTER KILLINGS IS AGAIN UNCERTAIN, AND PERHAPS EVEN MORE SO. BUT THEIR OCCURRENCE LEAVES DOUBTS. AND MOSHTAQUE WOULD HAVE KNOWN OF THE DOUBTS.

5. WHETHER MOSHTAQUE COULD HAVE LONG HELD THE PRESIDENCY HAD HE RESUMED THAT OFFICE IS ALSO OPEN TO QUESTION. CONFIDENTIAL

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THERE ARE RUMORS -- AND NOTHING MORE TO DATE -- THAT THE SEPOYS INSPIRED BY THE JATIYO SAMAJTANTRIK DAL (JSD) OBJECTED TO THE IDEA THAT MOSHTAQUE BE RETURNED TO OFFICE. IT MAY WELL BE HIS RETURN WAS SOUGHT BUT THE CONSEQUENCES FOR RESTORING DISCIPLINE WITHIN THE ARMY, REVEALED AS ALMOST NON-EXISTENT ON NOVEMBER 3, COMPELLED HIM TO REJECT THE IDEA. HOWEVER, SUCH AN ACT OF SELF-DENIAL, IF IT OCCURRED, WOULD SIMPLY HAVE ENHANCED MOSHTAQUE'S REPUTATION FOR STATESMANSHIP.

6. WE HAVE NO REASON TO THINK THAT MOSHTAQUE WILL LEAVE THE POLITICAL SCENE. IT SEEMS DISTINCTLY LIKELY THAT THE FORMER PRESIDENT HAS AGREED THAT, AT THIS POINT IN ITS HISTORY, BANGLADESH MOST NEEDS A HEAD OF STATE WHO IS NEUTRAL, AND THIS JUSTICE SAYEM APPEARS

TO BE. MOREOVER, HE SURELY REALIZES THAT THE COMING MONTHS MAY BE A TIME FOR UNPOPULAR DECISIONS, ES- OECIALY IF THE PRESERVATION OF INTERNAL SECURITY BE- COMES A LARGE PROBLEM. (THE ACTIONS OF THE JATIYO SAMAJTANTRIK DAL OVER RECENT DAYS MAY PRESAGE A PERIOD OF HEIGHTENED INSTABILITY.) AND HE PERHAPS CALCULATES THAT THE MEMORY OF HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS BETWEEN AUGUST 15 AND NOVEMBER 6 WILL COME TO OUTWEIGH BY FAR THE DOUBTS ABOUT HIS ROLE ON AUGST 15 AND NOVEMBER 3. AND THESE DOUBTS WILL BE MORE QUICKLY OVERCOME IF BANGALEE FEARS OF INDIA INCREASE SINCE MOSHTAQUE'S REPUTATION AS STAUNCHLY ANTI-INDIAN AND THE SUSPICION THAT SHEIKH MUJIB AND THOSE MURDERED IN DACCA CENTRAL JAIL ACQUIESCED IN INDAIN PREDOMINANCE WILL GIVE JUSTIFICATION TO AUGUST 15 AND NOVEMBER 3.

7. MOSHTAQUE IS NOT A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS. BUT HE IS A MAN FOR CERTAIN SEASONS. UNLESS BANGLADESH COLLAPSES INTO ANARCHY, OR IS OVERWHELMED BY REVOLUTION, WE WOULD THINK THAT WHEN A POLITICAL PROCESS BASED ON REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT BEGINS AGIAN, MOSHTAQUE AHMED WILL BE VERY MUCH IN EVIDENCE.
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